



by **Claude Bodeving**,
National Youth Service, Luxembourg

P o r t f o l i o
P o r t f o l i o
P o r t f o l i o
P o r t f o l i o
P o r t f o l i o
P o r t f o l i o
P o r t f o l i o
P o r t f o l i o

European Portfolio

for youth leaders and youth workers

**“Happy to see
that it finally came out.
We needed it.”**

(Excerpt from an evaluation received during the trial phase)

People who work in youth organisations or as trainers in youth activities, are fully aware that they need to know their own strengths and weaknesses concerning contact with young people. They may find themselves thinking “I find it very easy to accept criticism and defuse situations.” However that in itself is not enough. First of all it is a personal judgment which is necessarily subjective (how do my colleagues see me in this respect?) and it is important not just to let things stand there. What does it mean exactly? How is it of benefit to young people, to the group or group dynamics?

Moreover, is it actually important in my work? Should I not focus on other aspects of my conduct? The latter points are tied up with a fundamental question: “what actually are the key characteristics of a youth leader/worker?”

► **Identifying and listing: functional analysis**

One of the chapters in the Council of Europe’s European Portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers addresses these very questions (“When you think of yourself as a youth leader or youth worker, what is it that you do? What functions do you fulfil?”) and draws on a functional analysis of youth leaders/workers. Five key functions are listed (each is explained in detail in the portfolio):

- 1: *To empower young people*
- 2: *To develop relevant learning opportunities*
- 3: *To accompany young people in their intercultural learning process*
- 4: *To contribute to organisational and youth policy development*
- 5: *To use evaluative practice*

In the international context of the Council of Europe, it is not easy to produce such an analysis. It has to reflect a huge range of working environments and varied youth work concepts and youth policy approaches. Nevertheless, during the trial phase of the portfolio, the analysis received a largely very positive reception. It seems sufficiently extensive to reflect the diver-

sity of situations and realities on the ground while at the same time offering the necessary precision and clarity to respond to practitioners’ needs. (For instance, one evaluation received read as follows: “In my recent youth work experience I had the opportunity to see in practice these functions and at the same time they constitute the reality of my youth work.”).

In the long term, the functional analysis pursues two objectives, being geared towards:

- a) social recognition, which refers to the regard in which youth organisations are held and the status of this type of education in the eyes of society in general (yes, we do have clear and important functions in our work for and with young people!)
- b) the quality of youth work: the functional analysis is a major contribution concerning the issue of the potential of non-formal education and seeks to trigger a process of reflection on the very nature of youth work and the functions and capabilities of voluntary and professional youth workers.

And it should be remembered that we are at the very heart of non-formal education for young people here:

What are the basic concepts of non-formal education and to what extent do they influence my approach to and actual performance of youth work? How does my own youth work situation stand in relation to the Council of Europe’s approaches and principles? What are the underlying principles of my approach to non-formal education?

► **Assessing and describing: the competency framework**

How can youth leaders and workers perform the functions listed in the functional analysis? For each of the five functions, the portfolio sets out a list of the competences needed to perform them, along with aids to reflection.

If, for instance, we return to our initial statement (“*I find it very easy to accept criticism and defuse situations*”), in the

list of competences, under the function *“To empower young people” we find the competency: “I am ready to have my ideas challenged”* (with, as an aid to reflection: *“Are you open to constructive criticism? What are the limits?”*).

Under the function *“To accompany young people in their intercultural learning process,”* we find, inter alia, the following competency: *“I can cope with ambiguous situations”* (*“When things don’t turn out the way you think they should, or your ideas are not immediately accepted - what do you do?”*).

The portfolio then becomes a self-assessment tool which enables youth leaders/workers to assess their competences and then demonstrate the competences they have acquired (*“When did I last demonstrate this competence? What kind of examples do I have to show this? Who was involved?”*).

We have already said that the portfolio is a tool for social recognition. Now we can see that it also involves personal recognition: What are my competences? How can I describe them? Do I have proof? How can I list them in my CV?

► **Moving ahead: personal development and learning plan**

“I find it very easy to accept criticism,” is easily said as we see ourselves in a positive light but is it really true? To find out, we would need to have the queen’s magic mirror from Snow White, which can put things in perspective (*“Mirror, mirror on the wall, who can accept most criticism in the country overall?”*). After self-assessment of competences, the portfolio asks users actively to seek feedback and ask people they trust to give their views on the assessments. That is also an active appeal concerning our ability in terms of *“I find it very easy to accept criticism.”*

This leads to a broader and more concrete view of our own competences (perhaps: *“I was too willing to accept criticism X in a particular situation and I avoid the debate young people want.”*).

The last section of the portfolio is given over to working out the most specific possible personal development and learning plan: *“What do I want to do? How? With whom? When?”*

Here we come to the very heart of one of the characteristics of non-formal youth education, which focuses on the learning process and should be seen in the broader context of lifelong learning. Learning depends on people’s willingness to learn and educate themselves: any form of recognition must not only provide “proof” of what we are able or not able to do but must also encourage this willingness to learn and seek personal development. In providing a functional analysis, describing the necessary competences and thereby facilitating self-assessment, the portfolio seeks to encourage users to draw up their own development plans (development self-assessment instead of cognitive assessment). In short, the approach reflects that of all non-formal work with young people: young

people are encouraged to think about themselves (including their strengths) and to determine their own personal development needs and seek their own learning environments, while being aware of their resources.

For our initial statement, that could mean:

“At the next training course, I will not avoid criticism but will actively seek clarification of the criticism, compare it with my thinking or approach and encourage genuine discussion about the various points of view, while not losing sight of the goal of developing joint action and learning.”

► **Identification - assessment - personal development**

In short, the long (never-ending) but interesting road to personal development begins with clarity about our own position, and the portfolio is an incentive:

- to find out where we stand in relation to youth work and to examine our relationship as youth leaders/workers with young people and youth work;
- to describe our own competences and assess them;
- to draw up our own personal development and learning plan.

In this respect, the portfolio remains a flexible instrument suited to non-formal education, which was devised on the basis of the underlying values, principles and standards of the Council of Europe’s policy in the education sector.

At the same time, it is a tool which increases personal and social recognition of non-formal education and youth work.

One last time, *“I find it very easy to accept criticism.”*

While this statement can be seen as an active approach to exchanges and the reflection of a desire to build on the reality of individual situations, it is also the approach of the authors of the portfolio, and the final sentence in the words of welcome to the portfolio therefore reads as follows: *“And please let us know what your experiences have been in putting together your own portfolio - although this is officially the “final version”, we know that this process must go on.”*

The Portfolio can be freely downloaded here:

www.coe.int/youthportfolio

Contact :

claudio.bodeving@snj.etat.lu

